

consensus between the government, the media and public opinion. Democracy is pivotal in the formation of this consensus. In order to understand the status and authority of "democracy" we need to draw upon broader perspectives of the relationship between language and culture. The dialogue-dispute between Jacques Derrida and Martin Heidegger provides valuable insights into the ways in which language and media representation contribute to the formation of the preconditions of democratic consensus. Media representation is an unstable compound of images, information and cultural elements within a context of ongoing language wars. Democracy, as a highly contested discourse within these wars, needs to be re-defined and re-configured in order to restore its power and viability as a productive resource in the advance of contemporary cultural politics.



## The Electronic Polis: Media Democracy and the Invasion of Iraq

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### 1. Media Straw

Witness this army of such mass and charge,  
 Led by a delicate and tender prince,  
 Whose spirit, with divine ambition puffed,  
 Makes mouths at the invisible event,  
 Exposing what is mortal and unsure  
 To all that fortune, death and danger dare,  
 Even for an eggshell. Rightly to be great  
 Is not to stir without great argument,  
 But greatly to find quarrel in a straw.

-- Hamlet, IV, iv

<1> The American-led victory in Baghdad was announced to the world with scenes of Iraqi citizens dragging down the statues of the deposed tyrant. Like the spectacle of World Cup Soccer or the Olympic Games, the image was transmitted live through the global media network to the billions of people who had been closely watching the three week invasion. President Bush shared in the celebration, announcing the dawn of a new age for freedom and democracy in the Middle East. This new democracy, the president proclaimed, would bring stability and prosperity to the region through the obliteration of terrorism and the installation of a truly representative people's government. Supporters of the invasion and the Coalition perspective were vindicated by the scenes of jubilation and the knowledge that the American-led forces had achieved in three weeks what the United Nations had failed to do in twelve years (Salusinszky, 2003: 11).

<2> Opponents of the war, however, invoke an equally formidable notion of democracy to impugn the invasion. Critics in both the eastern and western hemispheres argue that the invasion represents a brutal transgression of the rights and dignity of the Iraqi people. A truly democratic nation would not inflict such unnecessary and pernicious harm on the bodies, lives, society, culture and material infrastructure of an independent, sovereign people. The claim by leaders such as British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, that the Coalition was acting within the legal authority Resolution 1441, is seen by opponents of the invasion as a critical transgression of UN democratic principles. Saddam's tyranny is matched by the Coalition's attacks on a people who were already destitute and defenseless, and who could expect as much oppression from foreign invaders as they had experienced under the autocratic régime. This view of the invasion is further confirmed in the rapacious descent of American companies seeking lucrative reconstruction and oil contracts. The looting of museums, hospitals and public buildings by "jubilant" Iraqi citizens, and the continuing crises in law governance, health and social infrastructure expresses as much about the moral and ideological deficiencies of the invaders, as it does about the former dictator. According to critics like Noam Chomsky, the full impact of these crises will diminish the proclaimed justifications for invasion; in fact, Chomsky explains, the very rapidity of the American-led victory demonstrates how insignificant the supposed Saddam threat has actually proved to be -- despite Coalition claims about Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs), "the Gulf war and the sanctions reduced Iraq to the weakest military force in the region. Even the countries Saddam invaded don't regard him as a threat" (Chomsky, 2003: 1).

<3> Chomsky, along with numerous other critics of the invasion, believes that "genuine" democracy which is predicated on justice and informational transparency (Pilger, 2003, Pasquillini, 2003) is critically threatened by the imperialist actions of the United States and a complicit mass media. While it is not our intention in this paper to engage directly in the substantive debates around the moral, ideological and social efficacy of the Iraq invasion, we are concerned with the ways in which these debates are expressed and mediated in terms of the language or discourse of democracy. Indeed, as Danilo Zolo has remarked, it is not possible in a contemporary cultural context to

consider the issue of democracy without direct reference to its mediation --

The essential concern ... [is] the relationship between democratic institutions and the increasing complexity of post-industrial societies.... Our present theories of democracy fail to offer us conceptual instruments sufficiently complex to permit a realistic interpretation of that relationship. As we prepare to enter the third millenium, Western political theory appears increasingly unable to cope with the massive transformation which "the information revolution" is bringing about in the primary subsystems of industrialized society. These transformations seem certain to speed up the processes of functional specialization and consequently ... to bring about still further large-scale growth of social complexity (Zolo, 1992: 54).

In accepting Zolo's premise, we argue in this paper that *democracy* is a complex and multi-dimensional concept, one that is subject to ongoing semiotic disputes and "language wars." While our use of the notion of language wars will become clearer as we proceed (see Lewis 2002a), we want to suggest at the outset that our sense of culture is predicated on struggles over meaning in language; these struggles may constitute a form of social and political crisis, leading to actual bodily violence. In this sense, "democracy" is a critical value and referent in the ongoing language wars that are being formed around the American-Middle East polemics. These underlying language wars have expressed themselves in the violence of various recent military engagements -- the Sudan, the Guilf War, 9/11, Afghanistan, and the Iraq invasion. We refer to these engagements as "the 9/11 Wars" (Lewis, 2002b) since all are predicated on a critical sense of cultural difference, including and most importantly the agonism that centers on the discourse of democracy.

<4> We would also suggest at the outset that the conduct and expression of these language wars cannot be separated from their mass mediation. The almost sacred status of the concept of democracy has been achieved not merely through familial and educational socialization processes which "inform" the public of its civil and political responsibilities and rights; rather, the semantic, semiotic and symbolic value of "democracy" has been fortified, if not actually created, through the auspices of the media and its meaning systems. This is not to re-state, in Althusserian or Frankfurtian terms, that the mass media simply serves the ideological or determinist interests of specific institutional and social élites. This paper, in fact, while situating the media and the Middle East conflicts within a context of particular kinds of social, economic and political hierarchies, argues from the outset that the engagement of meaning-making in the formation of "democracy" and "democratic action" is a highly complex discursive and cultural process. In this sense, the deployment of the notion of democracy by the political hegemonies of the US, UK and Australia is bound to culture in two clearly interrelated ways. First, it is the rubric which represents all that is good and virtuous in the modern state, a powerful almost unassailable ideal that must light the way to happiness and prosperity for all peoples of the world who would accede to its obvious power. Articulated through a national context, this ideal becomes the justification for any action, whatever the failings and flaws of particular leaders, policies or historical circumstances. The second way in which the concept is mobilized by political hegemonies is through the expression of public approval for the government and its actions. That the elected government acts "democratically" is the predicate of an engaged media and public who believe that their representatives are proceeding in accordance with their wishes and interests. This is both a condition of electoral "representation" and of the processes of the engagement of public opinion. The successful waging of war on Iraq is enabled, that is, by the war's increasing popularity with those among the citizenry whom the "government" represents. As we will explore below, the tripartite consensus of the state, public opinion and the media provides the context for the successful waging war in a democratic state (Carruthers, 2000, Lewis, 2002b). Our interrogation of the notion of democracy, therefore, directs us towards the cultural and linguistic preconditions by which this consensus is able to emerge. Specifically, we begin with a general analysis of the formation of language wars before returning more directly to examine the ways in which a mediated democracy has been implicated in the Iraq invasion.

## 2. Sonic Scaffold

<5> The anti-invasion rhetoric has centered on three critical issues. First, it has accused George Bush and his key Republican advisers of seeking to control Middle East oil resources; US government policies and CIA interventions in the region, most especially through weapons supply and financial support for political militants (including Saddam Hussein), have been driven by America's own economic and industrial interests. Secondly, the rhetoric challenges the Coalition's repudiation of United Nations' processes, especially those associated with the weapons inspection program. The claim by the Coalition leaders that the UN process was actually hindering the removal of Iraq's WMDs is seen by opponents of the invasion as a form of diplomatic hyperbole designed to justify military aggression while distracting from public view America's own hideous arsenal and global domination. Thirdly, opponents argue that American and British aggression centers on a desire to establish a strategic military foothold in a generally hostile Islamic region. In this sense, the installation of a "sympathetic" government in Iraq is likely to serve America's broader security and

economic interests within the region as a whole. While this desire is frequently situated within a broader context of historical imperialism and racism, opponents of the war also point very directly to America's need for retribution following the 9/11 attacks on Washington and the Twin Towers. According to the anti-war rhetoric, the violent reprisals against Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrate to the world that America will deal savagely with any person or group who dares defy its authority and its will.

<6> In fact, both supporters and opponents of the Iraq invasion appear to be in some agreement over this final issue -- that the 9/11 attacks have shifted the balance in American foreign policy as well as domestic support for those policies. While some commentators like Noam Chomsky (2001) and Michael Moore (2001) see this shift in relatively simple terms as an extension of plutocratic and governmental control, there is no doubt that the 9/11 attacks aroused much deeper sensibilities in the American people about themselves and their relationship with the rest of the globe (Lewis, 2002b). In effect, the 9/11 and reprisal attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq constitute a fundamental political, intellectual and moral dispute over the meaning and discursive integrity of "America" and its culture. This is not to deny the importance of leadership and policy, but rather to excavate beyond the lines of the semiotic values that constitute specific cultural forms. As a resonance of these earlier engagements, the Iraq attacks are part of ongoing language wars by which ideas are engaged through meaning and culture. The 9/11 wars, we would suggest, are part of a determining and pre-determined struggle of signification, one which clearly inscribes itself on the ways in which a people articulates a collective identity against internal and external disputes of meaning. While there are many dimensions to a language war, our concern here is for the specific contention over the notion of democracy in terms of an expressive idea(l), as well as a connotative set of values and institutions.

<7> In an early text Jacques Derrida has provided for us an elegant concept for analyzing the formation of ideas in language, including the ways in which language may be deployed as a form of cultural politics. Specifically, Derrida explains in *Of Grammatology* (1974) how Rousseau's social ontology may be captured by both liberal and conservative interests. In seeking an origin of human nature and value, Rousseau unwittingly provides a political resource which may be mobilized for quite different ends. The problem, as Derrida explains it, is that language or more specifically "writing" is fundamentally removed from its source: meaning is formed through the process of "reading" which supplements the text with all that might be missing. For Derrida writing here refers to all forms of systematic representation or "re-presentation" which removes the text from the immediacy of a given instance, event or material context.

<8> Of course, it is in *Of Grammatology* (1974: 158) that Derrida famously pronounces that "there is nothing beyond the text," meaning both that Rousseau's life history is inevitably accessed through his writings, and more generally that "the text" mediates all knowledge. As numerous commentators have explained (see Norris, 1987, Lucy, 1995), however, Derrida is not arguing that a material context does not exist nor that politics is not a central issue. Rather, it is to acknowledge that language is the central issue for all "reading" of all contexts, and that context itself is a dubious, if not theoretically "insufficient" concept. For Derrida, that is, the notion of a fixed and durable context belies the necessary impetus of supplementarity since even a context cannot exist outside the text and the imperative of reading. The concept of context is "insufficient" since "a context is never absolutely determinable" (Derrida, 1982: 310).

<9> More particularly, however, Derrida (1982) raises the problem of textual absence, indicating the processes by which re-presenting may provide an impression of "the present" and of "presence" which seems ultimately to disguise supplementation as it projects a "de-contextualized context of origin" and meaning (a non-originary origin). That is, what seems to be present in writing is in fact no more than a representation of what appears to be present, not a present (origin) in and of itself. This absence is particularly pertinent in the relationship between democracy and writing. Derrida identifies the critical importance of writing for the formation of the modern, democratic state: "In opposition to the autocratic cities of Antiquity, which were their own centers and conversed in the living voice, the modern capital is always a monopoly of writing; it commands by written laws, decrees and literature" (1974: 302). There can be little doubt that the transformation of Western political culture through the period of modernity is inevitably implicated in the rise of writing and print technology. Historians such as Walter Ong (1982), Elizabeth Eisenstein (1983), Benedict Anderson (1991) and Michel Foucault (1972, 1974) have explained how printed writing facilitated the capacity of the state to administer, socialize, educate, discipline and manage mass populations. This record-keeping capacity, however, is also associated with a significant transformation of "consciousness," most particularly as the individual subject is re-shaped in terms of the abstract nature of mass society and the representational processing of writing itself.

<10> In this sense, representation in writing is paralleled by representation in the politics of democracy. Authority is delegated (supplemented) through polis, government and state; meanings are delegated through writer, reader and text. The object and the subject of political authority are separated or "divided off," leading to a problematization of power, responsibility and transference; democratic representation

creates, that is, a dynamic of concentration and deferral, presence and absence: "Political decentralization, dispersion, and de-centering of sovereignty calls, paradoxically for the existence of a capital, a center of usurpation and of substitution" (Derrida, 1974: 302). For more recent political theorists, following Tom Payne and others, this cycle of representation and responsibility marks the essence of a successful modern democracy. Social order is assured as citizens will knowingly and willingly "substitute" *absolute* independence and "freedom" for the greater security and freedom provided by the state. Rousseau initially idealizes this relationship by contending that the principle of majority rule necessarily concurs with the principle of self-interest and personal freedom; the decision of the majority can never be at odds with a deviating position since that position is necessarily neutralized by the greater good of community accord.

<11> Ultimately, of course, Rousseau becomes disenchanted with this utilitarian paradigm, claiming that in practice representation removes the individual from the origin of his true nature and freedom. Recent political theorists such as Jurgen Habermas (1989), Danilo Zolo (1992, 1995) and Mark Poster (1995) confirm Rousseau's doubts, though not necessarily his solutions. Echoing a number of the criticisms of representation raised by the Frankfurt School of neo-Marxists, these later critics argue variously that representational democracy necessarily postures new forms of political hegemony, especially as it is generated and supported through a complicit mass media. While Habermas seeks the restoration of an oralist public sphere and the greater logics of direct participative democracy, Poster and others (see Lanham, 1993, Boller, 1992, Snyder, 1996) are enthusiastic about the potential of hypertext writing which would liberate communication from print and broadcast forms. Poster, for example, refers specifically to the limits of printed writing, which he regards as a linear, centralized and hierarchical mode of communication, one which maintains the Cartesian divide as it fixes the subject in an absolute relationship with the text -- the subject is positioned, that is, in terms of authorship, authority and set meanings. In these terms, writing is a communicative mode which is stable, rational and "logical"; it necessarily reinforces the power of author over reader, administrator over administered, state over citizen. In Derrida's terms, this form of communication is by definition "logo-centric" as it seeks to de-limit, as it disguises, the potential of difference.

<12> For Poster, as for other enthusiasts of a postmodern, interactive or "second media age," writing democracy is a manifestation of those 18th and 19th century social and political hegemonies which protect bourgeois and capital interests. Schumpeter's (1989) re-endorsement of Tom Payne's representationalism merely affirms, for many postmodern critics, the cultural ascendancy of writing as a communicative technology and writing democracy as an institutional hegemony. Derrida, however, would be less prepared to concede a dichotomy between writing and other communicative modes, arguing that both classical (print and scribal writing) and general writing (all other communicative modes) involve a process of representation, the problematization of context and the dynamic split between absence and presence. In this sense, Derrida's analysis is powerfully co-extensive to Martin Heidegger's later writings which are concerned with the absent-present problematic, but which claim that representation, culture and politics are radically transformed by the emergence of the new communications technologies -- most particularly those that generate the world as picture.

<13> In many respects, Heidegger's thoughts on the rise of the new communicative modes of photography and the moving picture provide a foundation for later critical writings which centralize the cultural role of electrical, broadcast and image-based technologies. In "The age of the world picture" (1977) Heidegger argues that image-based representation profoundly affects the formation of the modern subject. Where once the subject's fundamental nature may have been served by writing, and in particular the writing of science, the transformation of the world as picture promotes a new form of consciousness in which things can no longer be effectively placed, calculated or ordered. In this sense, the world picture is not simply a world view, although this is part of the outcome of transformation; rather, the world as picture actually metamorphosizes the status and consciousness of the individual subject. There are two structural elements to this transformation: first, there is the pretension to universality or totalism which Heidegger describes as the "ambiguous reality" of technology; and secondly, there is the tendency to systematicity (schematism) by which diverse elements are not merely brought together and organized (as in writing science) but they are drawn into a conforming and homogenizing representative system as *picture*. The subject confirms him/herself through a self-assertion which produces its own discomfiting and ambiguous oscillation -- the bringing forth and setting before the subject.

<14> Even so, Heidegger makes clear that the formation of the world as picture is an outcome of "man's" separation from his essential nature: that is the separation of the subject from his world of objects. The slide to subjectivism, or obsessive individualism, results from man's efforts to position himself at the center of all things. The world as picture is not merely a representation, therefore, but a centralizing process whereby "Man becomes that being upon which all that is, is grounded as regards the manner of its Being and its truth" (Heidegger, 1977:128). The subjectivism of such a world implicates the technology of representation by which the oscillation of "bringing forth and setting before" generates its own mass logics, its

own mass effects. In Heidegger's broader philosophy, then, the question emerges --

Only where man is essentially already subject does there exist the possibility of his slipping into the aberration of subjectivism in the sense of individualism. But also, only where man remains subject does the positive struggle against individualism and for the community as the sphere of those goals that govern all achievements and usefulness have any meaning. (Heidegger, 1977 133)

A world which is "conceived and grasped as picture" (1977: 129) distinguishes itself in terms of the conflux of absence in seeming presence. What appears to be present as the essence of the modern age, Heidegger tells us, is precisely what is missing. Heidegger refers to the totality of the world picture as "the gigantic," a culture which is transforming the substance of calculability or, more dramatically "knowability" -- "The gigantic presses forward in a way that seems to make it disappear" (1977: 135). The pictorialization of the vastness of the world actually reduces detail, events and texture into a conforming whole which is at once enormous as it is enormously reduced. If we substitute the notion of "world" for the more contemporary concept of "culture," we can sense a profound resonance in Heidegger's anxiety over "Americanization" by which representations only resemble themselves, avoiding at all points the possibility of "calculation" or measured understanding. This process of "becoming incalculable" constitutes an invisible shadow that is cast around all things everywhere as "man has been transformed into *subiectum* and the world into picture" (1977: 135). Extending the perspectives in *Being and Time* (1952) and "A question concerning technology" (1977), Heidegger makes clear this transformation of the world into picture defines the "essence of the modern age" (1977: 130). The modern era is not to be delineated in terms of the binary set reality-signification; rather, the world is actually a picture, a consciousness that is slipping into an absolute and homogeneous subjectivism.

<15> Thus, while Derrida proposes the existence of a writing democracy entirely predicated on the processes of representation, Heidegger identifies the ascendancy of the modern subject in the world as picture as the conduit to political collapse or emancipation. Derrida's supplementarity emphasizes the dynamic of dispersal and deferral in meaning, while Heidegger's greater interest in ontology identifies a countermovement toward increasing homogeneity in modern, primarily imagistic, representation. While this differing emphasis is clear enough, Derrida's critical method of "deconstruction" suggests that texts may, in fact, assume a significant cultural presence which might seem to deny their inevitable impetus toward supplementarity: a text generates a "seeming" ontology or a "seeming" presence which may incline the reader towards an homogenizing hermeneutic effect. If this were not so, then the deconstructionist critic would have no role since the text would immediately and necessarily unravel in the act of reading. In fact, the critic's responsibility is to foreground and unfix a text's informing assumptions as much as those homogenizing hermeneutics which would restore the text to its presupposing historical conditions and contexts. Supplementarity may well be understood as a partial process by which texts struggle within their own borders toward origin and exit, meaning and meaning deficit.

<16> Similarly, Heidegger's emphasis on the capacity of pictorial texts to generate an homogenizing subjectivism within a cultural context of "the gigantic" may nevertheless carry within it the potential for greater originality and social difference. Indeed, Heidegger himself identifies a countermove in the potential of "community" which may reconcile man's essential nature with the overriding impetus of modernity. Notwithstanding his idealized entrancement with Nazism in *Being and Time*, Heidegger seeks a return to an orality and a writing science which is both more personal and more elevated. Such an ideal community would favor argument over effect, presence over absence, creating the conditions for a re-invigorated politics of detail. In this way, modern humanity would be restored to itself as it is saved from the over-exposure of technological image-culture and a political subjectivism which prefers "consumer choice" to genuine freedom.

<17> What is significant, then, to both Derrida and Heidegger is an acknowledgement that the conditions of representation, most especially the volatile compound of absent-present, critically influences the ways in which contemporary culture and cultural politics are evolving. We would argue, the dialogue/dispute between Derrida and Heidegger provides a specific insight into the ways in which contemporary language wars are being waged over the concept of democracy. That is, the Heidegger-Derrida conversation points toward a more complete rendering of the processes of social and cultural engagement which constitute the political forms, authority and power of democracy's discursive ontology. In this sense, we are following Lewis's (2002a) proposal that signification is characterized by movements toward the association and dissociation of a signifier's internal signifier and signified. This oscillation of association and dissociation is precipitated through the imagining of subjects who draw on pre-existing and entirely original (the unconscious, sensate, sensibilities) cultural resources to form the imagining as utterance. Utterance itself may be shaped as speech, writing, image or other representational event. However, the moment of utterance will always be displaced through the moment of reception; at this point, the purity of nexus within the signifier is necessarily subjected to the oscillating impact of supplementarity and the absent/present. Meanings, that is, become problematized as signified and signifier scramble to re-associate against the momentum of separation and

cultural dispersal. The further the utterance travels from the context of its subject and his/her expressive moment, the more precarious the union of signifier and signified becomes -- and the more forcefully the re-association must be mediated. That is, meaning immediately falls into deficit as representation seeks to assert itself over the conditions of mediation and separation.

<18> An utterance enters the "gigantic," as Heidegger calls it, as it becomes a concept, discourse, representation or text, and as it is appropriated from its original temporal, spatial and cultural context by institutions. However, the oscillating effects are not diminished by de-contextualization; rather, they are amplified as the deficit in meaning grows exponentially with cultural attempts to fix it as durable and normative knowledge. The signified actually becomes more erratic and volatile as it becomes more susceptible to the conditions of semiotic dissociation and irruption, and the broader conditions of re-appropriation, re-interpretation and meaning dispute. Utterances as discourse become the raw resource of what Stuart Hall calls the "struggle to signify" and what we are more broadly describing as ongoing and inevitable "language wars."

<19> It is these language wars which constitute, in many respects, the amplification and outbreak of the intrinsic instability of the compound signifier. Language wars represent a semiotic resonance which provides a kind of vectoral or sonic scaffold for organizing and dissolving an infinitude of social and cultural elements. Thus, while discourses and texts may be driven toward greater association through the centralizing force of institutions and socio-political hegemony, countermoves seek to dissolve and challenge these ideological concentrations, both through assaults on individual signifiers and against the meaning of texts, institutions and institutional practices. Language wars are engaged, therefore in the formation of semiotic allegiances and social organizations, as well as counter-organizations (organized opposition), marginalities and the sensate or spontaneous agonisms that emerge through the conscious (art) or unconscious (everyday practices in life as lived) assault on standardized meaning authority. At their most violent, these language wars may erupt into actual physical and military engagement.

### 3. Bones

<20> The language wars that issue through and around the notion of democracy, and which are central to wider military engagements over the 9/11 violence, emerge during the early phase of modernism. While initially devised as a specific organizational mechanism for the protection of capitalist and mercantile interests (Zolo, 1992, Held, 1995), democracy emerges as a more complete ideology as it is institutionalized and fortified through the auspices of writing. As a durable referent which must survive the lifespan of governments and individuals, democracy is paraded as the confluent power which reconciles a notion of universal freedom with a practice of hierarchical differentiation. A representational or "writing" democracy, that is, enables an imagining of logical, orderly super-presence whereby an individual subject's experience of political "absence" (the absence of pure self-determination) is supplemented or transferred to a sense of ubiquitous governmental presence. Thus, governmentality and freedom seem to be co-extensive, rather than mutually exclusive. Presence is expressed through the individual's sense of democracy which ultimately, and as Heidegger and later Baudrillard argue, is itself supplemented through the acquisition of purchasable material, informational and symbolic products. More broadly, democracy and democratic institutions appear to have mobilized their writing authority through the integration of canonical documents -- constitutions, standing orders, bills of rights -- with an unceasing production of administrative dictums, records and information.

<21> In this way, the absence of self-determining individuals is supplemented by the presence of discursive configurations such as "electorate," "polis," or "populations" which are to be administered and surveilled (Foucault, 1977). This "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991) is perpetually re-affirmed through the production of decorative texts, public architecture, rituals, monuments and political personality. Indeed, even the legislative machinery itself can be seen as a mechanism for the production of self-affirming authority and the right of the government to wield unassailable power over its citizens since every legislative act derives ultimately from the power of the people themselves. Democracy -- as a convergence of ideas, institutions, discourses and practices -- creates the associative belief, at least for many people who live within its constituent imaginary, that the people are governing themselves and that political and economic oligarchies are figments of the practical imperatives of leadership and organization.

<22> Even so, democracy remains subject to the counter impulses of language war. While the text of democracy, along with "freedom," has achieved an extraordinary status in modern cultures, it remains an oscillating effect -- the subject of intense dispute and internal volatility. While Derrida's notion of supplementarity helps to explain the forward momentum of these disputes, we need to look toward other dimensions of the representational-signification process in order to understand the subtlety, complexity and counterflows that characterize these language wars. In particular, and as we have noted in our discussion of Heidegger, there are important differences between the modes of writing and pictorial publication. These differences are evinced in the respective

object-artefacts of the two modes as well the socio-cultural flows that are associated with their distribution and consumption. In political terms, writing democracy exists as the co-extensive other of a "broadcast" democracy. These specific forms of textual democracy overlap and contend with one another; they share specific representational modes but there are also notable differences in orientation and effect.

<23> Specifically we would contend that a broadcast democracy emerges through pictorialization, as Heidegger claims, and a "new orality" which was considered by Marshall McLuhan. Communications historians such as Walter Ong (1982) and Elizabeth Eisenstein (1983) have argued that immediacy and a sense of the unfolding present are the principal characteristics of oral cultures. Of course, and as we have noted above, orality remains as a critical communicative mode though it's no longer possible for the technology of spoken language to support in isolation the complex communicative demands of modern, mass societies. While speaking specifically about radio, McLuhan's notion of a "new orality," which facilitates communication across vast spatial and temporal zones, might seem to re-invigorate the immediacy of spoken language, restoring a greater potential for "presence." Heidegger's world as picture, along with antecedent theories of Walter Benjamin, Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard, also claim a new status for the image which contends a new immediacy and the redundancy of time and space. This new imagistic immediacy might seem to create an intrinsic sense of the "ever-present" human subject which is articulated in the ongoing and ineluctable conditions of a televisual culture (Lewis 2002a). The new orality and the world-as-picture, that is, constitute a new media omnipresence which pervades all contemporary experience.

<24> In effect, and this issue is intimated in the works of all these theorists though never quite explicated, this omnipresence is a feature of a more intense "omni-absence." The new orality, which is a permutation of mediated rather than interpersonal or communal voices, deftly intensifies the absent-present of writing. The expanding publication of broadcast media, along with the peculiar and somewhat paradoxical nature of the electronic artefact itself, seems to create an even more volatile context for the signifier; the electronic voice, as opposed to interpersonal orality or writing, subjects the signifier to a more rapid engagement with counter-claim, dispute, supplementarity and meaning deferral. The pervasive image and voice of the human subject and the less rarefied context of viewing (over reading words) creates an impression of community that is at once immediate and "real" but also profoundly deceptive. The immediacy of the imaged subject is not housed in a durable context of lived experience, but is duplicitously evanescent and intensely abstract, a seeming presence which is merely conditional, a life that has no depth-presence, no resonance beyond the memory of counter-memory.

<25> The meanings generated through the televisual media are in a state, not merely of deferral, but of perpetual deficit. A meaning debt is created by the professional media, along with a promissory note that the debt will be redeemed in the next bulletin, episode or installment. The news media, in particular, works aggressively to overcome its deficit as it seeks to honor its social, semiotic, financial and historical responsibilities. As a component of writing democracy, the news media seems to take seriously its informational role as fourth estate; in general terms it seeks to converge the lived experience of the "story" into the lived experience of the reader/viewer. In a broadcast context, however, the problem of deficit becomes critical, leading to a self-referencing whereby the media is its own lived experience and story. Meanings are generated through its own conditions and contexts, its own centralizing and institutional authority. The rabid and rapid engagement with the lived experience cannot overcome the imperatives of oscillating effects and readers are left to wash about in a bewildering miasma of imprecise and ineffable facts.

#### 4. Bomb the World

You can bomb the world to pieces  
But you can't bomb the world to peace.

"Bomb the world," Michael Franti

<26> During the Iraq invasion, the protest voices of musicians like Michael Franti and the Dixie Chicks were censored by various broadcasters in the United States. The Dixie Chicks, in fact, dramatically retreated from their musical dispute with the U.S. government after receiving death threats which accused them of anti-Americanism. Protests, of course, continue to be heard on the streets and through the Internet, creating a self-referencing democratic sphere for those citizens who remained outside the encompassing wrap of "national consensus." In fact, the tripartite consensus between the state, media and public opinion (Carruthers, 2001, Lewis 2002b) is clearly a contingency of the writing democracy we have been discussing. The very existence of protest, marginal and ineffectual as they appear to have been, is frequently invoked by George Bush as evidence of a healthy American democracy -- these are precisely the values and rights which the American troops went into Iraq to defend.

<27> Where once it may have been necessary to have God on the side of a just war, it is now necessary to reference democracy (and freedom) as the harbinger of legitimate

military action. Carruthers, as we have noted, argues that public support is a necessary precondition for the waging of a successful war by a modern democratic state and that this consensus may be actively generated by the state, plutocratic interests and the information media of the military. Phillip Taylor (1992) argues, in fact, that the military's management of the media in the 1991 Gulf War ensured that the horrors of military engagement were kept at a distance from America's domestic citizenry and indeed from the citizenry of the entire world. In their assessment of the media and the military, Young and Jesser (1997) claim that the successful waging of a "just" war is critically dependent on the capacity of the state to communicate necessary information to its citizenry. National security, Young and Jesser argue, must subsume all other governmental responsibilities during times of threat. Information must therefore be strategically managed in order to maximize military advantage and minimize social disquiet or anxiety. Governments must effectively communicate their perspectives in order to persuade the citizenry of the "justness" of any specific strategy or action. To a certain degree, these processes of information management include the tactical release and withholding of information in order to optimize "communicative effects."

<28> Critics of the Iraq invasion, notably, Robert Fisk, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, argue that the voluntary and military control of the media limit its capacity to perform its public duty. As Chomsky notes --

It is entirely typical for the major media, and the intellectual classes generally, to line up in support of power in a time of crisis and try to mobilize the population for the same cause. That was true, with almost hysterical intensity, at the times of the bombing of Serbia. The Gulf War was not at all unusual (Chomsky, 2001: 30).

Robert Fisk (2003) points specifically to the American attack on Reuters and the Al Jazeera journalists, who were reporting from the Palestine Hotel, as evidence of information control in the Iraq invasion. The killing of these and numerous other journalists during the invasion indicates an insidious distrust by the Americans of a media they cannot directly control. Fisk asks -- "Is there an element of the American military which has come to hate the press and wants to take out journalists based in Baghdad ... working 'behind enemy lines'?"

<29> Fisk's interrogation of the notion of "enemy lines" points to a far broader problematization of geography in the war and its mediation. Clearly, the territory of Iraq is re-imagined through the reporting, as mainstream media networks, along with their embedded journalists, recapture the territory for the informational gratification of the home culture. This is not reporting at a "distance," as Phillip Taylor discusses in the context of the 1991 Gulf War; rather, it is an attempt by the private and military media networks to speak directly and "immediately" to the domestic audiences, giving them a sense of the presence and value of the U.S. democratic mission. The war is conjured through the broadcast media as a presence, a reality and a lived community experience. As we noted above, the media perpetrates itself and its vision in terms of a deficit of meaning. Each image, segment or installment seems to confirm the story, and what is absent (death, bodies, scorched earth, contention, Weapons of Mass Destruction, Saddam himself) is irradiated through an insistent presence which generates its belief through a gathering momentum of emotional and intensifying verisimilitudes. This momentum is personified in the voice and body of the journalist who shouts from the back of an invading transport vehicle, assuring us that all is going according to plan and that the spearhead of this dawning democracy is not the abstract words of politicians and leaders at home, but the brave young men who represent all that is virtuous, healthy and good in the culture. These young men, who may be as familiar and everyday as the boy-next-door, are prepared to risk all, like Hamlet's Fortinbras, for the justness of the cause.

<30> Of course, what is also absent from the story of the invasion of Iraq is what is intrinsic to the information and imagery itself: that is, the actuality of the lived experience. Whatever the conjuration of the image-voice and the story, the imagining of the lived experience is always and inevitably a representation and a meaning deficit. This is not merely the financial deficit that impels the production of the story, but the deep demands of a meaning-rabid media which must create a story out of the bare bones of its own semiotic resources, its own "lived experience." In this way, the media feeds on its own proliferating and compulsive imagining, creating the story, as it creates itself, through an association or consonance of already existing supplements -- images, ideas and texts which have already told the story of America's heroic democracy over and over again. These supplements, through fictional narratives, news bulletins or propaganda, create the preconditions for audience (public) believability or consensus which might constitute a self-actualizing semiotics that is grounded in what we conveniently epitomize as "American culture." This is not in itself information control or ideology, as both supporters and opponents of the Iraq war frequently claim; rather, it is part of the associating processes which bring an utterance into the center and which seek to generate its inviolable meaning.

<31> We might, in fact, understand this capacity for semiotic consonance in the following photographs: the first was the photo published by major newspapers across the world during the bombing raids on Baghdad and Basrah; the second is the uncropped version which was generally not considered publishable.





Figure 1: cropped image



Figure 2: uncropped image

What is absent in the first photograph is the sheer horror of the invasion and the political decisions that consent to the maiming and killing of children. What is also absent is a story of democracy which condones various kinds of murder and which continues to deny the rights, freedom and cultural integrity of the people of the non-developed world. The presence of the cropped photograph indicates the viability of the democratic mission which appears an almost innocuous or sublime act in which strange people and their strange customs may be embraced by the greater good. The image of an avuncular gentle-looking man and the almost serene, angelic girl seem strangely to produce that presence which confirms the divine duty of the liberator. Beyond this content, the very framing of the photograph, the fact of mediation, gives legitimacy to the act of representation which is itself a form of social and cultural containment. The semiotic association, that is, parades its captives through a form of cultural appropriation (Said, 1993) which completely absents from view the implacable immensity of an industrialized media network whose singular motivation is the framing of the entire world.

<32> It is for this reason, perhaps, that the most popular version of the Iraq invasion in domestic America was the most compliant, self-censoring and sanitized. Like the censoring of Michael Franti and the Dixie Chicks, the voluntary text-cleansing of broadcasters like Fox might seem to confirm the substantial capacity of social hegemonies to control information and the minds of the citizenry; this is certainly the view of Noam Chomsky and others who see the formation of a tripartite consensus in times of war as a process of ideological domination. However, as we have explored in this essay, the process of association is highly volatile, especially in terms of a broadcast democracy which, while intensifying the concept as an omnipresence or universally available referent, creates a precarious compound of absent-present and supplementarity. The oscillating effect necessarily draws upon all that is absent, creating an inevitable and disturbing condition of dissociation. The public opinion which may have supported the Iraq invasion is extremely unstable, even whimsical, as it will be continually subjected to the vagary of strategic believability, media reporting, propaganda and military control. The maintenance of the information campaigns, American hostility to the UN, and the ongoing but thus far "unrewarded" fossicking for WMDs -- are all evidence of the U.S. administration's recognition (fear)

of its own vulnerability to an unstable public opinion. The continuation of protests and the unceasing disdain being expressed through the alternative media for the invasion and occupation of Iraq also indicate that the language wars that surround the notion of democracy is also far from resolved.

## 5. Conclusion: Expressive Democracy

"The people of Iraq should be allowed to choose their own government, not have the Americans choose democracy for them."

-- Muhammad Farouk Bashir on the Fall of Baghdad

<33> As we have suggested, the processes of meaning implosion or dissociation are intrinsically bound to the alternative flows of consonance or association. The act of representation is ultimately susceptible to those cultural impulses and elements which have brought the imaginary into a textual form. The unstable compound of absent-present, along with the propitious and inevitable counter flows of meaning deficit, create the conditions for social re-appropriation as much as for public consensus. That is, the informational and imagistic resources that are generated through the media become available for new ideas, meanings and imagining. A writing democracy might seem to have stabilized governance processes as it mediated the problematics of individual and collective political interests within an hierarchical social and economic system. However, and as we have argued, writing democracy remains subject to the divisional processes of representation. These processes are more profoundly intensified through the rise of pictorial or broadcast communications technologies. A broadcast democracy is one which seems to surrender more fully to the precariousness of representation, supplementing (as it challenges) the impression of referential and constitutional stability propagated through a writing democracy.

<34> The rise of a broadcast democracy and an electronic polis needs to be explored in far more detail. Proponents of the idealized institutional notion of democracy often impugn a "personality" politics which locates, as it personifies, policy debates in terms of a popularity contest between leaders of the major parties. In a mediated cultural context, however, such engagements are inevitable as politicians play the part of celebrities and celebrities play the part of politicians (literally as Ronald Reagan, or analogously as Michael Franti). That is, in a broadcast democracy politics and politicians become media products in a self-referencing mediation system. As Powell, Rumsfeld, Bush and Blair enter the domesticated media space of the home, they are entering the imaginary of personal and community politics. In effect, this space represents a convergence of public and private politics, the "sphere" in which individuals gather and generate ideas, opinions and sensibilities. Everything is measured, captured and rounded out in terms of the conversational and interpersonal conditions of the home. The politics that are conducted through the media are integrated into the home community, so that debates around war become re-signified into the sense and life experiences of individuals within a context of the life-as-lived micro-politics of micro-publics.

<35> In this way the broadcast media may also become part of a visceral or bodily democracy, one in which the individual is re-engaged into a participative public sphere. Such ideas of an alternative democracy have been generated through the writings of Bakhtin (and Medvedev, 1978), Bataille (1987), Barthes (1975) and de Certeau (1984), evincing themselves in the media theories of people like John Fiske (1989), Howard Jenkins, (1992), Ien Ang (1996) and Janice Radway (1987). The more recent permutation of this visceral politics is found in the "second media age" theories of people like Mark Poster (1995), Howard Rheingold (1993), Charles Ess (1994) and Pierre Levy (1998) who celebrate the emergence of the Internet as a new source and conduit for political expression (Lewis, 2002a: 397-410). As either a broadcast or digital networked democracy, the individual and his/her body are identified as the central fount of expressive freedom, an elision from the controlling power of institutionalized capitalism and the state.

<36> It is certainly true that the Internet, in particular, provided important resources for those who sought to challenge state and military orthodoxies during the Iraq invasion. Indeed, as the 9/11 language wars continue, as they inevitably will, the facilities and semiotic resources generated through the Internet and public (community) media will undoubtedly play a critical informational role for those seeking to generate alternative meanings. Of course, there is nothing inevitably or intrinsically virtuous about the Internet, or indeed any representational facility; however, in a global context in which broadcast and writing media continue to dominate our informational disputes, the Internet provides an important resource for generating origin and what we might call an expressive democracy. This expressivity, in our view, is the critical element for the construction of a politics of dispute that is not bound to modes of representationalism and the socio-cultural momentum that permits, even delights in, the horrors of war.

<37> Our idea here is not to do away with writing or broadcast democracies, but to refine our politics in terms of a more expressive notion of freedom and justice. The failure of democracy is explained not by its unreasonable desire for durability and the

reconciliation of individual and collective interests. It is rather that representation itself is mobilized in support of an unsustainable absent which in turn is articulated through various forms of social and cultural hierarchy. The obscenity of war is, ultimately, the iteration of an obscene culture. And whatever consolation we might derive from the knowledge that all culture, like all signifiers, will eventually collapse needs to be measured against the serious damage that associative formations and institutions may inflict in the process. An expressive democracy would, therefore, shift the emphasis from durability, authority and order toward a more robust and equitable generation of meaning-as-creation and a cultural engagement which consistently renews itself through the formation of sensate as well as logical modes of interaction.

<38> Of course, we must engage with the various permutations of writing and broadcast democracy, but this engagement must be sensible to the gravity and limits of these older discursive forms. In our view, a democracy which parades itself as a political divinity could not and should not consent to the maiming and murder of children. If the Iraqi people are to avoid the formation of new horrors, then, like us, they need to embrace an expressivity that exposes old tyrannies, even as they are wearing new crowns.

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